

One summer evening in 1889, a young medical school graduate named Arthur Conan Doyle arrived by train at London's Victoria Station and took a hansom cab two and a half miles north to the famed Langham Hotel on Upper Regent Street. Then living in obscurity in the coastal town of Southsea, near Portsmouth, the 30-year-old ophthalmologist was looking to advance his writing career. The magazine *Beeton's Christmas Annual* had recently published his novel, *A Study in Scarlet*, which introduced the private detective Sherlock Holmes. Now Joseph Marshall Stoddart, managing editor of *Lippincott's Monthly*, a Philadelphia magazine, was in London to establish a British edition of his publication. At the suggestion of a friend, he had invited Conan Doyle to join him for dinner in the Langham's opulent dining room.

Amid the bustle of waiters, the clink of fine silver and the hum of dozens of conversations, Conan Doyle found Stoddart to be "an excellent fellow," he would write years later. But he was captivated by one of the other invited guests, an Irish playwright and author named Oscar Wilde. "His conversation left an indelible impression upon my mind," Conan Doyle remembered. "He had a curious precision of statement, a delicate flavour of humour, and a trick of small gestures to illustrate his meaning." For both writers, the evening would prove a turning point. Wilde left with a commission to write his novel, *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, which appeared in

The city, in all its brooding grandeur, takes center stage in stories featuring the master of deduction. "Holmes," says Conan Doyle biographer Andrew Lycett, "could never have lived anywhere else but London."

